Government's attention has been drawn to press reports on remarks by the US Secretary of State to the effect that a formula for a moratorium on fissile materials needs to be found in addition to other steps for US sanctions to be lifted. Government's view on unilateral restrictive economic measures have been set out in official statements. India has stated that it would constructively participate in negotiations for a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning future production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear exposive devices. India will pay serious attention to any other multilateral initiatives in this area, during the course of the negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

Cadre Review in Regional Passport Offices

578. SHRI E. BALANANDAN: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that there has been no cadre review in the Regional Passport Offices since its inception;

(b) whether any such demand has been raised by the employees for initiating a Cadre review in that organisation; and

(c) if so, what steps have been taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) A detailed proposal for a comprehensive review of the Central Passport Organization cadre is currently under Government's consideration.

Issue of Passports

579. SHRI E. BALANANDAN: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Indian Embassies are engaged in the issue of passports;

(b) if so, the reasons as to why the specialists in the field *i.e.*, the employees of the Regional Passport Office are not being engaged for the same in the Indian Missions;

(c) whether there is any proposal to engage these specialists for the issue of passports from abroad; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d) the deployment of officers belonging to the Central Passport Organisation is governed by the rules of service applicable to their cadre. The officers posted in the Consular Wings of Indian Diplomatic Missions and Posts abroad are competent to discharge duties relating to the issue of passports and visas and provision of other consular services.

Black listing of Indian companies by US

580. SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the United States Government has blacklisted 200 companies and organisations both in the public and the private sector as reported widely in the press;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reaction of Government thereon;

(c) in the light of these developments the detailed status of Jaswant Singh—Talbott talks and the chance of any meaingful agreement between the two sides; and

(d) the stand of government on the question of signing the CTBT in view of all these?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) and (b) The US Department of Commerce published on 13th November, 1998 a list of Indian entities that will be subject to export restrictions. The list includes 40 Indian

Government agencies, Government affiliated firms and private companies as well as certain military entities. Together with their subsidiaries, the number is 208. Commerce Department licenses will be required for export by US companies to the listed entities.

GOI issued a statement on November 14, 1998 that this as a highly unfortunate development. These restrictions interfere with the free flow of trade, technology & finance and have an adverse impact on mutually beneficial business interaction. This decision reflects the continuation of a coercive approach that is entirely misplaced and cotunter-productive. Such steps are unhelpful for meaningful discussions towards an improvement in bilateral relations which is desired by both countires.

(c) The sixth round of ongoing bilateral discussion between Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Shri Jaswant Singh and US Deputy Secretary of State, Mr. Strobe Talbott was recently held in Rome on November 19-20, 1998. The two sides reviewed issues related to disarmament and non-proliferation, bilateral relations as well as regional and international developments. The two sides also discussed and positively evaluated the report on expert level meeting on export controls between Indian and American delegations in New Delhi on November 9-10, 1998. The Indian delegation raised its concerns about the recently published entitiers list and our access to international financial institutions. Both side agreed to meet again in January, 1999 in New Delhi.

(d) Soon after its nuclear tests, India announced a unilateral moratorium on explosive nuclear tests and also expressed its willingness to convert this moratorium into a dejure obligation. India, is engaged in discussions with key interlocuters on a range of issues, including the CTBT. India is prepared to bring these discussions to a successful conclusion, so that the entry into force of the CTBT is not delayed beyond September, 1999. India expects that other countries, will adhere to this treaty without conditions.

Food processing and agro based industries

581. SHRI SURESH KALMADI: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is fact that Government have adopted a five point programme to boost food processing and agro based industries for ensuring farmers prosperity; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) and (b) While inaugurating the four day "Agro Advantage—Maharashtra" Conference, Prime Minister made the following announcements:—

(i) The Government has taken steps to make Small Farmers Agro-Business Consortium (SFAC) function a High-level coordination body at the Centre and in the States to promote public and private investments in agro-business. It will also encourage mutually beneficial collaboration between the cooperative sector and the corporate sector.

(ii) The Government has taken steps to strengthen and expand the Futures Exchanges in many commodities. A proper future exchange is important as it will help the farmer survive the vagaries of market forces, as other businesses do. It will provide him a place to hedge his produce and reduce his risk. The Central Government has also recently strengthenec the Forward Markets Commission which will soon have many regiona offices.

(iii) There is considerable scope for increasing our exports of agro-products by taking advantage of India's geographical and climatic strengths. Our country can also be a very good production base for joint ventures for export to third countries. The Ministry